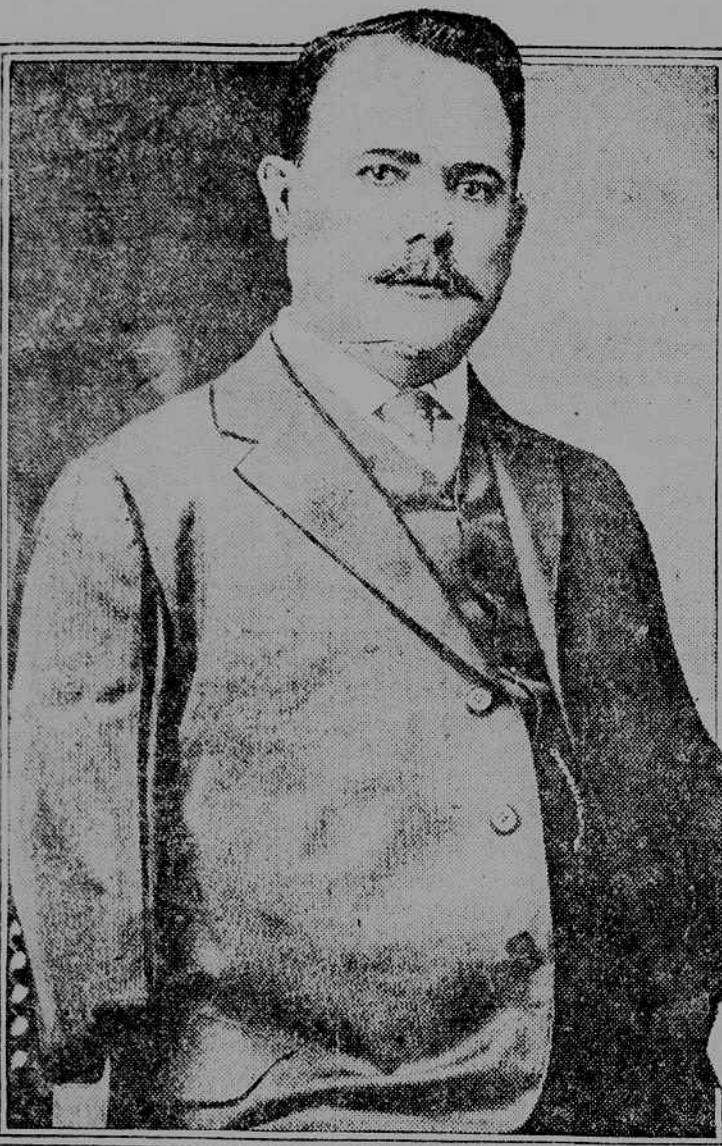


What Manner of Man Is the New President of Mexico?



By Sophie Treadwell

A NEW President takes the rule of Mexico Thursday—Alvaro Obregon. Can he, as we say, get away with it? For being President of Mexico is no sinecure. Perhaps it could best be listed as a risk.

In the last ten years of the three actual Presidents since Diaz two have been murdered and one died, practically a prisoner, in a foreign land.

But if it isn't particularly safe, being President of Mexico, yet it is everlastingly exciting. Probably no job in the world to-day available to the ordinary man can so fulfill the normal lust for power of the average human being.

Diaz, Absolute Dictator

Diaz, President for thirty years, was an absolute dictator, wielding a personal, direct and unappealable power that reached into every branch of the government and that could make or break any human being in the country from lowest peon to highest scientific.

And every President who preceded or who followed him has held in his hand, if not the same scepter (and the power of the rod is in the hand that wields it) at least the potential makings of the same scepter.

Mexico is a republic, but a republic in which more than one-half of its citizens can neither read nor write; a republic in which 40 per cent of its people are pure Indian and almost 50 per cent halfbreeds, mestizos, people of mixed race.

Speak Sixty-three Languages

This Indian strain has produced some great men: Juarez, a pure Indian; Diaz, almost. Yet the great mass of the Indians of Mexico are still, as the Russians say, "people living in darkness." More than 2,000,000 of them understand nothing but their native dialect. Of the sixty-three languages spoken in the republic fifty-two are Indian.

Yet the Indians of Mexico enjoy all the political and civil rights of citizens.

The constitutions of Mexico, since the independence, have been models of legal phraseology. Her laws are among the most enlightened in the world. But her people, the mass of her people, are still helpless in the prison of ignorance and poverty, while the land itself is fabulously rich and brilliant in its beauty and variety.

"Mexico," said Baron von Humboldt, "is a beggar sitting in a palace."

It is to rule this land and this people that now comes Alvaro Obregon.

What sort of man is he, and what does he look like?

Has a Powerful Eye

He is a good looking, robust man of just forty, medium height, strong looking, thick chested. He has high coloring; he looks as though he enjoyed life. You are aware first of his eyes. He knows how to use them over men and women. They

ALVARO OBREGON, who will be inaugurated President of Mexico next Thursday

are tremendously expressive, with a certain curiously appealing quality. And his voice is alluring, caressing.

He can say "no" so indulgently one believes the favor granted.

He dresses like a successful American business man—and makes money like one, too.

Difficult to Analyze

He began life as the youngest of twenty children in a family practically without means. As a boy he did any and every sort of work that came to hand. Then he rented a piece of land to farm. Then bought it. He is now a millionaire. He is said to have made most of his fortune by getting a monopoly on the bean crop of the North. We would probably call him "the Garbanza King."

Just what is his character? Nothing more difficult to say. I had several interviews with him, but I confess I was able to know him, through them, very little. His quality is one of fluidity rather than of concreteness. He gives an impression of great frankness, impulsiveness. But he is illusive. He has the great gift of seeming to take off all the lids, yet never give himself away. He isn't afraid of being questioned. He answers everything immediately, without reflection, offhand. But he knows what he is saying. And he'll stand by it.

I remember an interview I had with him when he first entered the capital. It was cabled back from The Tribune and carried in the Mexican papers. His statements created quite a stir in Mexico City, and the Mexican reporters bombarded him en masse.

"Did you really say those things the American paper quoted?"

"Why not?"

"We thought maybe there was a mistake."

"Why so?"

"We thought perhaps if you didn't want to deny, you might like to modify the interview."

"Modify nothing."

Finally one of the Mexican journalists said:

"My General, hereafter when you are going to make important declarations like this, won't you be kind enough to make them to us first?"

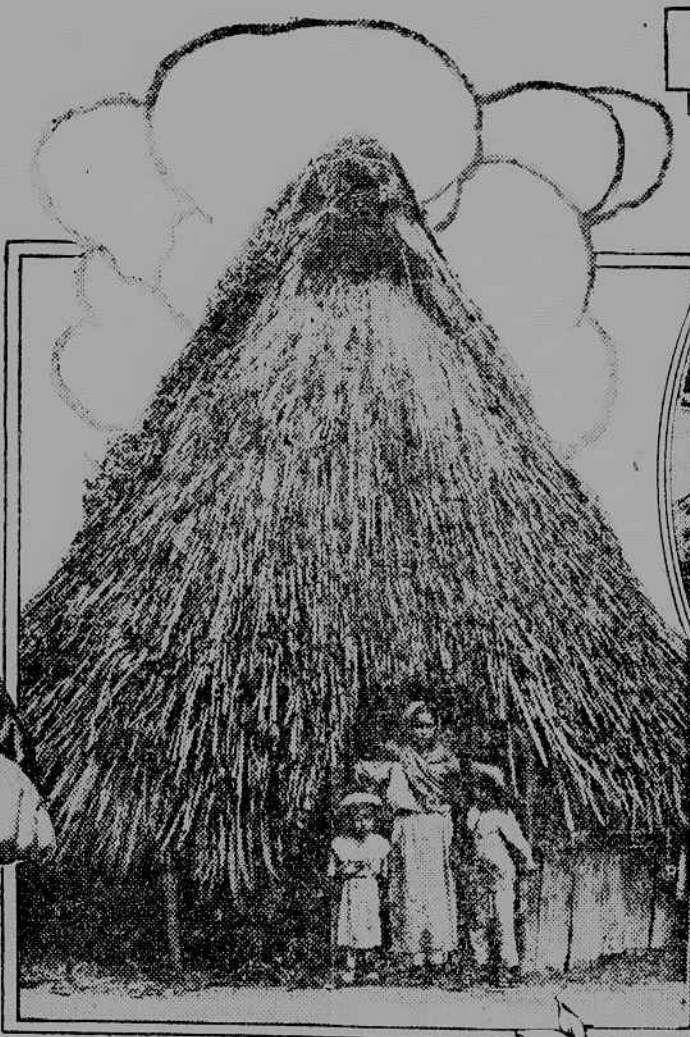
"Surely," with a good natured laugh, "if you ask me first."

Easy to Have Hedged

One of the men present told me of this. It was an easy moment for Obregon to hedge a little, if he didn't deny; with only a probably instinctively disliked American reporter to be sacrificed and his own compatriots to be pleased. Yet he stood by.

Obregon is not a popular idol in Mexico by any means. In the North, where he comes from, perhaps. But in the capital, and the South, not. He has been carried to the Presi-

Alvaro Obregon, Who Is To Be Inaugurated Next Thursday, Has Proved Himself a Good Business Man and a Brave Soldier. Now He Must Show His Executive Ability. Mexican People Hope for Peace



A TYPICAL Indian home of the poorer sort in Mexico

dency by the force of his own arm and brain; not by any emotional wave of popular demand.

Obregon the politician is a very clever manipulator. But he is not a cheap panderer to public opinion in any sense of the word. He has convictions and sticks to them, no matter how they run counter to public favor and the fulfillment of his own ambitions.

The most striking proof of this is that in a country where 12,000,000 of the 15,000,000 inhabitants are Catholics Obregon is anti-Church.

This is perhaps the greatest factor in Obregon's unpopularity in some quarters. This and the instinctive suspicion—made instinctive through centuries of experience—that the average Mexican has for any man in power.

Mexican a Weary Cynic

There is a certain weary cynicism in the heart of every Mexican, even of the most childlike peon. The Mexican may be impressionable, but he is hard to fool. The reason he submits to having so much "lumpy work" put over on him by his leaders is not that he is tricked, but that he doesn't think the situation can be bettered. He is essentially a fatalist.

The innate difficulties and "ease-ness" of Obregon's new situation—contrasts that have their root deep in the race and its history—are complicated by the immediate last ten years—these last ten years that have destroyed the old order and created new hates.

The whole crop of debts, dictates and disillusion that were the sterile products of his predecessors has been inherited by Obregon.

All the injustices, confusions, promises, grousches and grievances have been kept stewing and are now dished up—piping hot—to Obregon. A sort of inaugural banquet.

All the thwarted ambitions, from the Felicistas who never got in to the Carranzistas who just got out—all disgruntled, all sore, all enduring an imposed period of watchful waiting—a hungry pack at the foot of the Presidential plum tree, where the Obregonistas are now busily occupied in the top branches.

How Did He Rise?

How did Alvaro Obregon get to the top branch?

His friends will tell you he climbed.

His enemies—well, his enemies have many differing stories. I was in Mexico only the last six months. I saw the dinner served. But I wasn't in on the catering or the cooking. This much, however, is history:

Obregon is a Mexican of the North. He was a small farmer in the village of Huatabampo, in Sonora, when the Madero revolution

broke out. He joined the revolutionary forces with an insignificant force of Yaqui Indians. He fought during the Orozco rebellion in 1912 and came out of that campaign a colonel of volunteers.

He marched his now considerable force of Yaquis back to Sonora and was preparing to disband them when the news arrived that Huerta had overthrown Madero. That night Obregon, with his Indians, again rose in arms. Friends claim he was the first officer to take the field against Huerta.

Carranza, then Governor of the State of Coahuila, organized around himself the rebellion against Huerta. He called himself "the First Chief." Obregon and also Villa were among the generals who supported him.

Grew to a Big Army

By this time the Yaqui army of Obregon had grown like a herd in a round-up. He led them down the west coast to the capital. And when Huerta fled Obregon was outside the gates to receive the surrender of what was left of the Federal army.

Meanwhile, Villa, leader in the North, had turned against the First Chief. Obregon tried, by personal mediation, to patch it up and nearly got himself before a firing squad for his trouble.

Finally, however, a peace convention was brought about between all the antagonistic leaders at Aguascalientes. This convention lasted two months. The convention ended when Carranza said he would no longer heed the actions of the delegates unless they met in Mexico City, which he controlled.

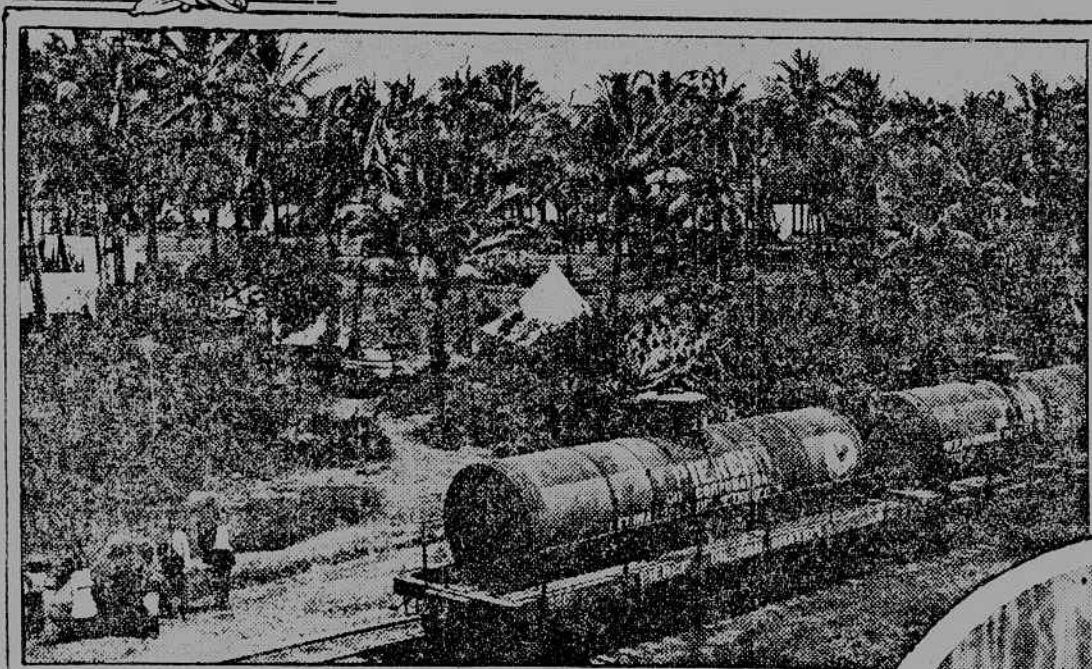
Villa declared war again, and with Zapata entered the capital in triumph.

Obregon, who still remained loyal to Carranza, fell back before Villa's superior army and remained inactive for several months, reorganizing his forces.

Reorganizing one's forces in Mexico has its humorous side. A Villista general who commanded 2,000 Yaqui



A STREET SCENE in the town of Guadalupe, near the City of Mexico



IT IS oil that gives the United States its greatest interest in Mexico

Indians rushed to Villa's headquarters one dawn with the disconcerting news that Obregon had stolen his army.

Obregon's Ancestry

Controversy runs high among the best of friends in Mexico City over the question of Obregon's lineage. Has he or has he not Yaqui blood? Those for cite the fact that he speaks the difficult Yaqui language and has tremendous influence over these refractory people, a power they scarcely would recognize in any one not of their own blood. While the "Nos" cite Obregon's looks. He is purely a European type—Spanish, with perhaps a bit of Irish back somewhere.

Be that as it may, Obregon's forces grew. Suddenly, he swept upon the Zapata army in Puebla, and then came on to attack Villa.

Villa made his stand at Celaya. Here was fought the celebrated battle in April, 1916, that ended Villa's power and took from the victorious Obregon an arm.

The loss of an arm by Obregon has not been without its advantage. Confirmed optimists who claim to find good in every bad could find no better proof of their philosophy than Obregon's lost arm. There is no doubt that this visible crippling has contributed much to what popularity he has gained. Here is a general who has obviously suffered for his country; an officer who undoubtedly has led troops.

Obregon the Strong Man

To a people experienced largely in generals who have achieved their rank through favor, and who have used it only to sign inflated vouchers, the sight of one who has not only really fought with his men, but has actually lost an arm doing it, naturally rouses them to enthusiasm.

This was in 1915. Obregon was



ONE OF the typical beggars of Mexico, an all too common sight

the strong man in the Carranza camp. And when in 1917 the First Chief became the constitutional President, Obregon had the post of Minister of War.

The story of his military rise in these few years, from a volunteer captain to Minister of War, is set forth by Obregon himself in a thick volume called Six Thousand Kilometers of Campaign.

But he has brought to the swift growing of his career other gifts beside a native military talent. These gifts now found fertile field of action. Carranza personally was never much liked by Obregon, nor did his public actions as President find favor with his minister. Furthermore, Obregon felt that he had made Carranza, and this is always a difficult feeling in any walk of life for one man to cherish toward another.

Obregon knew he was the strong



AN INDIAN of the San Juan Teohuacan

man. But he was a strong man strong enough to wait.

Knows How to Wait

Here was the field for other talents. There is no doubt that, in spite of Obregon's so-called impulsiveness, he knows perfectly how to wait. He knew how to wait until Villa eliminated himself by banditry, until Zapata was killed, until Carranza had played his string out absolutely to the end and until the skids were ready for Gonzales. Then once again, at the head of his Yaquis, he rode into Mexico City.

People were amazed at the swiftness, completeness and orderliness of the last revolution. They knew

stables. People who lived in the North when Obregon swept through after Villa tell of general devastation. (I believe Obregon, in his book, remarks that he learned much from Sherman's march to the sea.)

The Mexicans who remember these things are still incredulous before the order that came into the country six months ago.

A Man of Versatility

They do not realize that Obregon is a very versatile man, who can do one thing one time and the opposite the next when the opposite is the thing demanded. They do not appreciate the many sides to Obregon's character, the variety of his talents, nor the difference between Obregon, the soldier, fighting to win, and Obregon, the soldier and politician, who has won.

Obregon's range of talents is, indeed, very little appreciated in his own country. He is not only the strong man, the soldier who knows how to handle troops and the quiet, subtle man behind who knows how to plant a plan and wait for it to ripen, but also he is the actor in the limelight. He can make a stirring speech and write a thrilling phrase. Or, in our parlance, he is not only the boss but the standard bearer as well.

Another Obregon

There is still another Obregon for whom the Mexican public is quite unprepared. That is Obregon the President.

Obregon the politician is a radical. But what of Obregon the President? Obregon the private citizen does not particularly like Americans. But what of Obregon the President? Obregon the man behind the Carranza throne was a Constitutional-ist; but is Obregon the President going to let a literally interpreted Carranza document stand between his country and peace?

Upon the answer to these last two questions depends the stand or fall of the Obregon regime. Whether or not the situation is just, whether or not it is being handled not only with fairness but with tact, has now nothing to do with it. The situation is:

Our Friendship

No President in Mexico can at this time endure without the friendship, the backing, of the United States. This may not be an agreeable or a pleasant fact below the Rio Grande. And any one who knows anything of Mexico, her tragic history, her sensitive character, must know that it is not. But it is, for this moment anyway, a fact.

The United States cannot flood on, on the tide of vast material achievement in which she is being carried, without oil. Mexico to-day produces 60 per cent of the world's supply. It is oil under Mexico's soil, but brought out by Anglo-Saxon money and work.

The American Urge

Now, this terrible urge of America is not to be stopped by a dictate that she holds as unjust as it is in the way. Article 127 of the last Mexican Constitution enrages Americans, not only because it is a barrier thrown up suddenly across the way they were going, and going fast, but also because, very sincerely, very truly, it seems to them essentially unjust.

Is Obregon the President enough, self-contained enough to accept his country's destiny? Or will his Mexican pride and high-strungness betray him in these difficult moments? Quien sabe?